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LETTER

TO A

GENTLEMAN

UPON

OCCASION

Of Some

New OPINIONS

IN

RELIGION.

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L O N D O N,

Printed for Walter Kettilby, at the Bishop's Head in  
St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1696.

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TO  
FROM  
OF  
NEW ORLEANS  
IN  
RELIGION

LONDON  
Printed and Sold by Messrs. W. & A. G. & Co. at the Bishop's Head in  
St. Paul's Church-yard, 1793.

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A  
LETTER  
TO A  
GENTLEMAN  
Upon Occasion of  
Some new OPINIONS  
IN  
RELIGION.

S I R,

**I**T was some Years ago my good Fortune to be acquainted with you, and I have ever since reckoned it one of the Happiest Accidents of my Life. You have all the Qualities that can recommend a Gentleman; a good Birth, plentiful Fortune, and liberal Education. Nature was extream Kind to you, in giving you a good Share of Sense, and your own Observations have exceedingly improv'd it; so that both for Knowledge, easiness of Access, and being free from the Reigning Vices, your Conversation is very acceptable to all Persons: And at your First appearing in the World you make as good a Figure as many that have lived in it a considerable Time.

Being sensible of this, I have studied you the closer, as Men that delight in Books read with most Attention

good ones. I find in you no considerable Faults ; some Mistakes there will be in all young Men ; but these, as the Morning Vapours , will easily be dispell'd by your Noon-Day ; and a few Years more Experience will make you shake them off, and scarce remember that ever they hang'd about you. A Person in your Circumstances will be expos'd in the wide World to variety. Flattery and Compliance will follow Power and Fortune : Pleasures and Youth will hardly part : And a Man that has Wit may be led too far by the desire of Knowledge. I am not concern'd for you in the first Instances : you are known to be Proof against Parasites and improper Diversions. If you want your Friend's earnest Wilhes in any, it is in the last. Reason is the best of things, and Knowledge the noblest Pleasure : But they are of so fine a Nature, that it is the easiest thing in the World to strain them ; and when they are so, they are the hardest to be recovered.

The higher our Contemplations are, the more dangerous the Mistake. To misplace Time in History, and Countries in Maps, or to make a wrong Demonstration in Mathematicks, is of no great Consequence, and may easily be rectify'd : But, suppose a Man should be wrong in the Notion he has of himself, the Consequence may be so dangerous, and so irrecoverable, that they ought to give him the greater Caution : it may prove worse to him than for a Minister of State to take wrong Measures in the management of Publick Affairs ; or for a Mariner to Embark in a leaky and rotten Bottom.

There ever was, and ever will be, entertained by Mankind a Notion of Religion ; and it is certain, that if it be any thing, it is of the highest Concern in the World ; for, it comprehends the Knowledge of our selves, of our Beginning, and our End : and there being, at least, Doubts and Presumptions of a future State, for fear they should prove true to our very great damage ; Religion ought to be the Compass by which we must here direct our Courses, that we may come hereafter to the desired Port. And this makes it of the greatest Consequence to have a  
right



right Notion of it, and extream dangerous to mistake in it.

It is not therefore a trifling Business, to be decided by the first appearance of Reason, and a superstitious Enquiry after Things. It requires stayedness of Thought, and a great deal of Circumspection, especially if a Man should go a bout to remove the very Foundation of it. For, as a Traveller that singles out a Way untrod before, and leaves the beaten Roads, must be very sure he shall not be wrong at last: So a Man who ventures to be Singular, and to go against the general Consent of Mankind, in a Matter of this high Moment, must have stronger and clearer Proofs on his Side, than all the opposite Arguments put together can amount to: And this you will own deserves Wariness, and requires the very utmost Care and Application.

If Men of Wit followed this Method, they would generally conclude right: But many are impatient of the Drudgery of thinking; they are contented to follow the first Glimps of Light, and never examine whether it is the Sun, or only a wandring Fire which is the Cause of it: And as a Papist, finding on the one side, our Arguments against Popery too hard for a loose Way of disputing; and, on the other, considering the Multitude of Christian Sects, especially since the Reformation, gives easily into the Belief of the Necessity of a Visible Infallible Judge of Controversies in the Christian Church; and as easily from some Places of Scripture misunderstood, takes this Judge to be the Pope, which supposed he blesses himself for seeing this, and looks with Scorn upon blind *Pre-  
sents* that cannot see it: So some hasty Gentleman, for want of Attention to the Proofs of Religion, and because there ever was in the World variety of Persuasions, and a great deal of Hypocrisie in most of them: because a whole Sect among the Jews believ'd neither Angel nor Spirit; because many learned and knowing Heathens did not believe another State: because most Men, even the wisest, live and die in that Religion they are taught at first, because of the notorious Impostures and pretended

Miracles in the Church of *Rome*; because some of the *Clergy* are Men of this World, and Negligent in their Office, are mistaken in Political, or have chang'd Opinions upon Occasion; chiefly, because the *Socinians*, who seem to be Men of Morals and Understanding, apprehend things contrary to the universally receiv'd Fundamentals of Christianity, particularly about the future State of the Wicked, which they believe will be annihilation or utter extinction of Being, and not sensible Sufferings: I say some Men of Wit, but impatient of Attention, upon these light Considerations, and without any further Enquiry, first please themselves with the Thoughts of Annihilation; then going one Step further, throw off all revealed Religions; and at last settle in the Belief of no Religion all, no Providence, and no God, and so laugh at the rest of the World, for believing these without sufficient Reason.

These Ways of arguing you are like to meet with, being, as you are, of a free and general Conversation: and the Gentlemen that entertain themselves with them, being generally Men of Parts, they are the more like to make Impression upon you; especially if they should be your Friends and Familiars who propose them; Men that have no Design upon you are good Company, and that you know of, not immoral: All these Favourable Circumstances may the sooner make you give ear to them.

I am not surpris'd that Men of Pleasure should study to confirm themselves in the Belief of these; it is their Interest they should be so, and Interest will cast a great Bias upon the Understanding: but that a virtuous Man should so much as give them a second Hearing, is to me Matter of Wonder; for these Persuasions are his greatest Enemies, as Religion is the best of his Friends: Religion will keep him Healthful, make him Contented and Beloved, when the contrary may ruine his Health, his Estate, and Reputation: not to say that he can lose Nothing, tho' Religion be but a Fancy; whereas an irreligious Man will be undone for ever, if what the generality of Mankind apprehends by it does prove true: For as a witty Poet, and

a favourer of these illogical Opinions was forc'd to acknowledge, speaking to *Nothing*,

*This of the Wise I may freely say,  
Thou from the Vertuous Nothing takes away,  
And to be part of thee the Wicked wisely pray.*

For this Reason I am apt to think that it is some secret refin'd Piece of Immorality, if not of a courser Nature, that makes Men please themselves with such Fancies, and acquiesce in them: And I believe it the more, because when these and the like Doubts are sometimes come in my Way, after I had immediately before given too much Room to some forbidden Hope or Desire, they have made some Impression on me: whereas after doing a vertuous Action, even in Secret, they appeared to me so Unreasonable that I could hardly endure them. I will not undertake to prescribe to others, but to my self I may. I have seriously weigh'd these Matters, especially since I understand that they are much talk'd of where you are, and that they pass through your Mind, at least as Topicks of Discourse: and that I might have no Prejudice to struggle withal, I sincerely resolve to think or do nothing for the future, which might force me upon these Shelves and Quicklands, as a Refuge after a Shipwrack. All duly considered, these are my free deliberate Thoughts about those Doubts and Opinions. And though I dictate to no Body, yet I wish that all who meditate upon these Subjects, or discourse about them, may be as free from any Weight upon their Mind, as I am at this present.

But before I go any further I would desire the Gentlemen who either believe these, or wish they may be so, to consider two things, which to me seem strong Prejudices against them. The first is, that taking away Religion is visibly contrary to their Interest: for it is by it that they enjoy their estates, and are at leisure of discoursing and thinking; that they live a less drudging, turbulent Life, than their Inferiors. I will suppose for Arguments Sake that they are in the Right: What would become of  
them

them if their Servants and Farmers, their Vassals and Dependents were of the same Opinion? There would soon be an universal uproar in the World; they would be forc'd to decide by Force and Blows, who should have the Use of any thing, and against the Arm of the Flesh, come probably by the Worse in the Scuffle; for, as for *Property*, it would in a short time be destroyed. This is a dangerous Prospect to a Man of an Estate, and may make him far from hugging himself; for seeing what the Bulk of Mankind does not, it is enough to keep him awake in the Night, for fear the World should rise the next Day as Knowing as himself, and set up the old Trade of *Leveling*; as the Jeweller could not sleep if he were in Fear that all Men should the next Morning be wise, and buy none of his Jewels. If there was no Religion, where would Faith and Trust be? what would become of Honesty and Friendship, the greatest and most useful Virtues in Society, and the noble Privilege of Humane Nature? for Humane Laws can only restrain outward Actions: They can, for Instance, hang for Murther, but they can never make Murther Villany in the Fancy of Men, because they have no Power beyond the Body: so that, by destroying Religion, Men unskilfully put themselves out of the Protection of Mankind, and must be treated as Out-lawd Creatures. For no body will trust them where they may evade the Punishment of the Law, or where they cannot be found out in their Prevarications; which Cases may be numerous in this obnoxious and offending Age.

And let it not be said that this is a Consequence not fit to be named, a Mystery not to be revealed to the Rabbble-World, as it was once reply'd to me, by some Gentlemen, to whom I put this Inconvenience: For if it be so, why then do they tax religious Men, particularly the Clergy, with Hypocrisie and Imposture, when themselves take part of the Benefit? There is no Hypocrisie if there is no Religion; and why may not the Priest live by the delusion of the People, as well as the Landlord by the mistake of his Tenants, especially where both are equally by Law establish'd? Take away Religion, there is no Injury  
done

done to any Man, if the supposed Injurer will but set up against Humane Laws, and desie the only Standard of Right and Wrong in these Gentlemens Opinion. Therefore a Man who pleads against Religion, *Samson*-like, pulls down the Pillars of the Building under which he is shelter'd, and must not take it ill if his Bones are broken by the Fall of the Roof upon him. I have heard Divines, in some Cases, reason as these Gentlemen do: For upon debate of proposing and answering seeming Difficulties about the Mysteries of Christian Religion, they thought fittest to pass them in silence, for fear the People should be disturb'd by them: But I thought this an unfair Way of proceeding: For, why should Difficulties be suppress'd? If they are unanswerable, as I take this to be, they are for that very Reason, the more to be publish'd. If otherwise, why should they be conceal'd by them that can solve them, when they may be found and stumbled at, by them who are not able to distinguish? For my part I am not afraid of an Argument, neither would I have Difficulties thus evaded. And if Religion has any Objections to it but half so strong, as that is which I now urge against Men that have none, I am contented it should be turned out of the World, tho' I should be never so great a sufferer, by the horrible Consequences this would bring upon Mankind.

The other thing which I observe is this, that in declaring against Religion, because of the variety of Religions, and because some great Men had none, they use that very Argument, which they do not allow to others. For, the universal Consent of Mankind, very few excepted, that there is such a thing as Religion, and the many as great Men of all Ages and Nations that believed a future State, is, at least, as strong a Presumption on the other Side. The truth is, both Arguments are unconcluding; I only urge the unequality of the proceeding. Whatever Number of Men argue right or wrong about a Matter, does not make it ever the more False or True, but its being in its self True or False. Tho' all the *Geometricians* in the World should believe, and endeavour

to prove, that the Three Angles of a Triangle are not equal to two right Angles ; or all *Aritbmericians* teach that Two and Two are Five, yet the Contrary would be True, for all their Authority and Numbers. And how Numerous soever be the Multitude that believe the Sun to have Light and Heat, yet it is not so because they believe it, but they ought to believe it because it is so.

Being now going to tell you what I think of Religion, I must before beg one Favour of you, which being reasonable, will, I hope, be granted : And that is, that you would not desire either Mathematical or Sensible Proofs of what I shall say, because the Thing will not bear it. And do not think much to allow this ; for you give every Day way to Arguments, where it is impossible to have such Proofs. Who has sensibly prov'd that a Banker will not Break, and that a Farmer will not run away ? Who can demonstrate Mathematically, that an obliging Carriage makes a Man generally belov'd ? These Things far from being thus provable, are not so much as certain : They may be, and may not be. And yet in the last Instance, your civil Behaviour to every Body shews you believe the Maxim, though it has sometimes prov'd False to very popular Men ; you trust your Money to the first, and your Land to the other, and in so doing venture more than you can do in the Case of Religion : For, if they deceive you, you lose a great Deal ; if Religion should prove False, you lose Nothing, as I said before.

The Proofs you can reasonably desire of me in this Matter, are Proofs arising from Observation, either in or out of our selves, and this not always Sensible, but often inward and of the Mind, and deducible only by a train of Thoughts and Inferences. This I would have People to consider, and not presently conclude there is no God, because we do not see him ; no future State, because no dead Man appears to us, to bring us Tidings from thence ; no Miracles, because not wrought before our Eyes. For this, if the Truth was known, is at the Bottom of some Mens Logick.



The Reason why the Proofs of Religion are not Sensible or Mathematical, but Logical and Moral, I conceive to be, because Man is not a Mechanical or Necessary, but a Rational and a free Agent. Had these Proofs been such, that no Man in his Senses could have resisted or gainsaid, unavoidable Conviction had been the Effect of them; and there had been no Virtue, because no Choice. But they are only able to persuade an attentive considering Man, and do not carry along with them irresistible Demonstration; that Men might be left to their own Freedom, and shew themselves either complying to sufficient Proofs, or stubborn against strong, but unforcible ones; either submissive where their good Inclinations and Tractableness have Satisfaction enough given them, or Refractory, where disorderly Affections, and an itching desire and search after improper Knowledge are predominant in them.

All these being thus fairly stated, I will for your Sake briefly and plainly declare my serious Thoughts about those Opinions in Religion, now too much reviled, and contrary to sound Reasoning. Whether you will judge so, depends upon the Proofs, which I submit to your Consideration.

That there is a God seems plain to me, because I have a Notion of him, as of an Infinite Being. I conceive it as impossible for a Finite Being, such as is Man, to have forged this Notion so much above his Capacity, as it is impossible for a Foot-Measure to reach the Sky. I am of Opinion therefore, that none but the very Being it represents could give it me, which must needs suppose that Being to exist. If it be answer'd that a Finite Capacity, as the Mind of Man, can as well frame the Notion as comprehend the Being: I freely own I do not comprehend God; I only conceive him, or I am satisfied that he is; as a short-sighted Man is satisfied that there is a Cause of the Warmth which he feels in the Sun-shine, tho' for want of good Eyes he cannot see the Sun. If it be reply'd that the Notion which we have of God, is not Natural to us, but visibly comes by Tradition, from our Parents and

Tutors at first, then by Conversation and reading ; I own again that it comes at first by Tradition, afterwards by Discourse and Books, to all Men that have Humane Education ; and that this, tho' it should go no further, is sufficient to the generality of Mankind, for the great end of Religion, which is a good Life ; as most Men know Kings and foreign Countries only by reading and hearsay, which is enough for the Purpose to make them good Geographers and quiet Subjects : But as Travellers know Kings and foreign Countries by their own Eyes, and would have known them, though not told of them before ; so Men of Thought assure themselves of the Being of a God, by their own Observations and Inferences, and would have found him out in Time though Tradition had not at first helpt them. It is hardly practicable to bring up a Child without any Conversation, as a King of *Egypt* is said to have done, to know what Language he would Naturally speak. But in such a Case, I am of Opinion that when Man grown, he would have a Notion of God, though much more imperfect than that we have ; as a young Tree neg'ected may not bear so good Fruit as if carefully look'd to, but still will bear in time some Fruit or other : And that which makes me believe this, is, because I conceive it impossible, as I said before, that any Man could forge the Notion of God ; so that tracing Tradition upwards through former Times, we must at last fix in some Body, to whom it was natural, by whom communicated to others, and in time improved. But I can see no Reason why any one Man should have it naturally, and not another ; therefore I am persuaded, that all Men, in this Sense, have it naturally. As for the Opinion of those, who attribute the Notion we have of God, to God himself, first revealing his Nature to some Men, and by them to others, down to us ; and who, for this Reason, will not allow it to be Natural to Mankind : Besides that they own a God, which is enough for my Purpose ; and that it were no great Matter, though the thing should be as they say ; I think they are mistaken, if they suppose that, that God by revealing himself to the first Men, did put into



into their Mind that Notion, which they would never have had without it; and that he taught them natural Religion, as Men are taught those things, which they could not of themselves have known: My Reason is, because even setting aside God's revealing himself to Man, yet I cannot conceive him without Reason and Morality, which supposes a God, as I shall presently prove. And let not some Men, who are thought to have no Notion of God at all, be alledged as Examples to overthrow all those; for, besides that it can hardly be made out that there are any such Men; granting that there are, they do not destroy the generality of the Rule, they are only an Exception to it; as the Blindness of some Men does not destroy, but is only an Exception to this otherwise universal Maxim, that all Men have Eye-sight.

My conceiving God as an all-perfect Being, and consequently having Existence which is a Perfection, is to me another strong Proof that he is; as it is certain that there are Angles and Numbers, because I have the Notion of a Triangle, of a Square, of a Polygone, and the like. So that Existence or Being is as much contained in the Notion of God, as the Number Three, and the Thing called Angle are in the Notion of a Triangle. If it be answer'd that supposing an all-perfect Being to be, he certainly exists, but that this Supposition does not make him to be; as supposing a Triangle to be, there are certainly Angles, though a Triangle is not for that Reason: I say that we have no simple Notion but what is true, though our mix'd Notions may be false. There are certainly thinking Subjects and extended Substances; there is Time and Place, Figure and Number, Motion and Situation of Things, because we conceive these. If they were not, how could we conceive them? In compounded Notions, or in our Judgments of simple ones we may err; but in the very simple Notions themselves we do not, because they are the necessary Result of the Being of those Things they represent. Therefore my conceiving an all-perfect Being (the most uncompounded Notion I have) supposes that that Being is or exists, because Existence is a Perfection.

But

But these Arguments are perhaps too abstruse and too Metaphysical : I will offer some more Palpable. What think you of the visible World, or of any Part of it ? It is certain that Nothing can make it self, for then it had been before it was, which is a Contradiction ; so that going upwards through Successions or Generations, we must at last fix in one first Thing that was made, as Man for Instance, or any other Creature, or however the Matter of them ; and what made it, is that I call God. To say that it is not necessary to enquire into the beginning of Things, is to evade the Difficulty, not to answer it. To say that Man and Beast, Land and Water, Rivers and Mountains, the Frame it self of the World as it is now, were made by Fate or Fortune, by the casual meeting and fixing of Atoms, is to observe only the Manner of the making of these, not their Principle or Cause ; for, Accident or Chance is not any Thing, but only the Circumstance of Things : Unless by Fate or Fortune is meant an Agent, and then that Agent is God : Now the God I believe is, no doubt, a Nobler Being than blind Fate or Chance ; and Atheists by denying my God are forc'd to own one infinitely below him, even by their own Confession. As for the Eternity of the World as it is now, it cannot be defended. If, for Instance, the Globe we inhabit were Eternal, all the Earth about Rocky Mountains, and all Hills, had been in an infinite Tract of Time wash'd away into the Sea, by the Rain : for, even within the Memory of one Man some are considerably diminish'd. Neither can the Eternity of moved Atoms be believ'd ; for, Motion is a meer Stranger to Matter ; and if Atoms could not move themselves, something mov'd them, and what mov'd them is God. And supposing their Eternity without motion, it had been impossible they could ever have been formed into any shaped Things, but must for ever have remained in the same Posture. And even granting the Eternity of Atoms, and of Motion, in them, can it appear likely to any Man, that either they could casually have fallen into this beautiful Frame, or would have continued so long in the same Figure, in the very midst of their irreconcilable justlings ?

justlings? It may be affirmed in Words, but I think it impossible to be conceived. Nothing can solve these Riddles and extricate these Mazes, but the Being of God, and owning that an Infinite, Eternal, all-perfect Being once made the World, and preserves it to this Hour.

I shall give but one Proof more of the Being of God, and that the plainest and the strongest. There is a God, because Man has the Notion of moral Good, and moral Evil, of Virtue and Vice, of a Noble Action, and of Baseness and Villany; and this independently from any Humane Laws or Customs. I desire the calmest Atheist to put the Distinction of these Things out of his Mind, as he easily might, if they were only the Work of Humane Device. Can any Man ever swallow this, that Faith and Truth, good Nature and Generosity, Charity and Kindness on the one side; and on the other, Cheat and Fraud, Knavery and Treachery, Breach of Promise and Ill Nature; that these so opposite Qualities do only differ, because Humane Laws made them to differ? If this be affirmed, then it follows invincibly, that if the same Laws please, these last, Knavery and Treachery, shall be noble and virtuous; the first, good Nature and Charity, villanous and abominable; that betraying ones best Friend may be Heroick, and murdering one's Father Generous; that Gratitude to Benefactors may be shameful, and serviceableness to Friends detestable. If this cannot be granted, as it cannot, then there is a Rule of Virtue and Vice antecedent to all Humane Laws; there is such a thing as Conscience, that is, after Good or Ill done, satisfaction or terror of Mind even in Private, and where these Laws cannot reach; and if there is such a thing as Conscience, there is a God the Standard of it. And let not Variations, about particular Virtues and Vices in some Nations be alledged as a Proof against my Assertion; as for Example these being made lawful at *Sparta*. For, such Examples do only prove, that the Rule which I lay down has been differently used in some Cases: But that it ever was, or ever can be differently used in all, as in the instances of Honesty and Villany

lany for Example, is more than any Man can either prove or believe, the contrary being too visible and too deeply rooted in the Heart of Man.

For this last Reason I am persuaded there are no perfect Atheists; that the pretended ones do but talk; that all their Arguments are meer Sound, since they are much better in their Practice than they must needs be, if they speak their real Persuasion. And, as many a Papist, even in those Cases where Casuists give grains of allowance to Treachery and Breach of Faith, may safely be trusted by Protestants, because the *Man* is better in him than the *Papist*: so Men that talk against the Being of God, and take away the Rule of moral Good and moral Evil, where Humane Laws are silent; these Men may often be confided in without Danger, even in most secret Transactions: They are often Honest and Good, Civil and of fair intercourse: And (some Liberties excepted relating to themselves, in which they use moral Laws pretty familiarly) in Cases relating to others, they give themselves the Lye by their virtuous and honourable Proceedings, and betray themselves to be worse Logicians than the Men in *Newgate*, and the *Tartars*. An honest Man who believes no God is a Contradiction; an Atheist, who is professedly Vicious, is but what he should be. The first acts against his Persuasion, the last according to it; and this last is a better Arguer, though the other is the better Man. There is no way to avoid this Consequence; therefore Men press'd with it, must be contented to let the Principle fall, and in their own Defence acknowledge that there is a God.

If there is a God, and if he is Infinite, all-perfect, the maker of all Things, and the Rule of all moral Virtue; it follows plainly that he governs the World, by his Wisdom and Providence. And they who acknowledge a God, and yet deny his Providence, own the Principle, but disown the necessary consequence of it, which is contrary to good Logick. Not to say that owning a God without Providence, is owning a meer speculative insignificant Truth, of not any more Influence on Men's Lives and

and wellfare in the World, than affirming that there are Inhabitants in the Moon, or that some Stars make a Parallax to our seeing.

God's being the Rule of moral Good, and the Spring in Man of the Notion of it, proves clearly that he governs Man by this means. Man is own'd to be the noblest of visible Creatures, being endowed with Thought and Reason, of which all others are destitute. And it would be very strange, that God should govern Man, and not the rest of the Creation; as if a Master did govern his chief Servants, and leave the under-ones lawless and unruly.

The very Frame and Course of the World is a plain Argument for Providence. The World is made of Parts of very differing Nature and Qualities, some of them in constant Motion and attempt upon others. The Winds and the Waters; the Celestial Bodies and the Subterranean Fires; are continually warring one against another, and all against the more solid part, the Earth. Had blind Fortune and Chance presid'd over these, they had long ago return'd into their primitive Chaos. But they still subsist, they are still, in the main, the same that they were at first. And it is to me greater matter of Wonder, that they are not confounded by this time, than it can be to any natural Philosopher, that now and then there are some Alterations amongst them, contrary to the standing Course of Nature.

What can any rational Man think of civil Government, but that it is, in little, the Image of God's natural Government over the World? Men of all Climates, Ages, and Tempers, at all Times and in all Places, ever lived under some Policy; and though under various Shapes, still paid Homage to Laws. It is true they often fall out, and by Factions and Wars both Foreign and Domestick, seem to threaten the Destruction of all Order amongst themselves; but soon or late they return to the old Standard, though never so much defaced or alter'd. Those very desperate Creatures, *Robbers* and *Pirates*, which bid Defiance to the rest of Mankind, and own Force and Violence

lence for their only Rule, yet will make some Laws amongst themselves, and submit to some Government. The very Brutes are observers of Laws: Some Birds will fly in great Order; others understand Seasons admirably; even the most ravenous Beasts seldom prey upon those of their own Kind, and against others will often fight with good Discipline. Had God made the World, and then left it at a Venture, to go on as Chance or Fortune should please, this admirable Thing called Order, had not been of long Continuance, between so many differing Kinds of living Things; but by this Time most of them would have been totally destroyed. But God's Providence in the very midst of their greatest Confusion watches over them; and by this Means irrational Creatures as well as Men, continue to this Day much in the same Method, into which they were put at the Beginning.

There is no governing any Thing without Laws; and in Case of a rational and free Agent, Rewards and Punishments are their necessary Attendants. What those Laws are by which God governs the mute Creation, is not the Subject of my present Enquiry. But as for those by which he governs Man, (I mean every individual Man considered by himself, and out of his civil Capacity) they are, all taken together, called by the Name of Religion; which is nothing else but those Rules by which Man is guided in his moral Actions, with Fear of some Punishment, in Case he breaks them, and Hope of some Reward when he obeys them; both to come from an Invisible Supreme Power, by whom all those Notions are imprinted in his Mind. This ever was the Idea Men had of Religion: The most barbarous Nations always apprehended by it thus much: And the many Extravagances which many fell into thereupon, are no more an Argument against Religion, than the great Number and variety of false Coin, now is an Argument against good Money. I need not run through all the Branches of these moral Laws, which together make up natural Religion. It is visible that one of them must be, owning the Matter of those



those Laws, and paying to him some Homage ; an other, living upon some Terms with other Men ; and another, preserving some regard to a Man's self. Take away any of these, the Allegiance to the Law-giver is not entire ; as in a civil Government Fundamental Laws are broken on the Subjects Part, by Treason, by Felony, and by self-murder, the particular Form of these Laws may have varied in some Subdivisions of these Three head Branches : But all Nations that ever lived did put these Three main Ingredients, into the Compound of their Natural Religion ; and the Motives which engaged them to observe it, ever, were Hope and Fear, whether relating to this World or to another.

I need not prove that Hope and Fear, relating to this World, are included in natural Religion ; for, no body ever deny'd it ; No, not the very *Sadducees*. As for Hope and Fear relating to another State, it being groundd upon the Belief of the Immortality of the Soul, the Foundation must first be establish'd, that the Superstructure may the more naturally be rais'd upon it.

That there is such a thing in Man as a thinking Principle call'd his *Soul*, is undoubted. That Matter is not capable of thinking, but only of Extension, Figure,\*and Motion, is agreeable to the general apprehension of Mankind. Whence it follows that the Soul of Man ( whatever the Nature of it may be ) is different from Matter. And Death being the Separation of material Parts, it further follows that the Soul does not die with the Body ; because it has no Parts, and consequently is not capable of Division or Separation.

Whether God can destroy by the same Power, by which he made it, is not a Question. He may, no doubt, reduce it into nothing as well as Matter, and in this Sense Matter and Spirit are equally Mortal, that is, annihilable by God Almighty, though Immortal in themselves, that is, unannihilable by any created Power. But that God does not destroy the Soul when the Body dies, seems to me evident, from the Consideration of his Infinite

Goodness and Justice. These two Noble Attributes of his must needs be the Standard by which all Distributions are made; and yet how many honest good-natur'd Men are all their Life-time Miserable? How many barbarous and villanous People live a pleasant and a prosperous Life? If there was no other State after this, at least for the Soul of Man, who can reconcile this seeming unjust Loss with God's Justice and Kindness? Men will be apt to think, either that God does not govern the World, which is contrary to Reason; or that he is neither Just nor Merciful, which is as contrary to it. Nothing can save these apparent Contradictions, but owning another State, at least for the Soul of Man; in which its good Deeds in this Life may be rewarded, and the wicked ones punish'd; in which the honest Sufferer may be recompens'd, and the cruel Persecutor treated according to his Demerits. And since the Body had a great Share in these virtuous or evil Actions in this World, it is a strong Presumption, if not a full Proof, of the Renovation of it in God's time, which we Christians call Resurrection; that it may partake of the Glory or Misery, which are then to be the Portion of the Soul.

From all this, considered together, it clearly follows that Hope and Fear, relating to another State, are included in natural Religion. And those honest virtuous *Heathens*, who believed these in the Main, though they might differ in their particular Apprehensions of them, built, no Doubt, their Persuasion upon some such Considerations and Arguments, upon which I have hitherto grounded my Assertions.

Thus far Reason may carry a Man in the search of natural Religion. But how can it be prov'd that there have been revealed ones, and that the Christian is the best and the most perfect of them? Miracles and Prophecies are ceased; And we have to do with very Difficult Men: yet for all this, the thing may be made out, if a Man will but carefully look about him.



To this end, having seriously considered the vast Number of Religions, which at one time or other did prevail in the World, and attentively examin'd the Records in which they are contained, and found nothing but Extravagance or Uncertainty in them : At last I observe a certain People called the *Jews*, which, by many Singularities are very remarkable.

They are a very ancient Nation, even by the Confession of Historians their Mortal Enemies. They have been turned out of their Country, and dispersed all the World over, above these Fifteen Hundred Years. Many Kings and Princes have endeavour'd their Ruin and Confusion, and yet they could never effect it. All the Nations that were overthrown and dissipated like them, even of a later Date, have long since been confounded with others, both as to their Blood and Religion. The *Jews* only live upon the Face of all the Earth, as Strangers every where, making no Body Politick : Yet they retain their Lineage and Descent ; they live unmix'd with other Nations ; and they have preserved their primitive Religion to this Day, though many attempts have been made, to destroy them, their Religion, and the Register of it.

This Book appears to be the most Ancient of any extant now : The beginning of the Historical Parts of it reaching Times past long before the old Empires of the East began, even before the Kingdom of *Egypt* was in being, known to be one of the ancientest in the World. Whoever reads it impartially will find in the Writers of it the most genuine Characters of Truth.

*Moses*, whose Writings are at the Head, and who, besides the History of his own Times, writ that of the Ages before him, was a sincere and an honest man. He makes very few Generations in many Hundreds of Years, and within Six or Seven Men from him backwards, reaches *Adam* who lived above two Thousand Years before him. For, being a Youth, he might see old Men, who being Young had seen *Jacob* ; *Jacob* saw *Abraham* ; *Abraham* *Shem* ; *Shem* *Lamech* ; and *Lamech* *Adam*. An Impostor, embracing

embracing so long a Tract of Time, wou'd have hid himself in the multitude of Generations, ( the chief Thing that renders Histories obscure ) at least Thirty or Forty, through which it had been impossible to trace him out ; whereas *Moses* makes but Six or Seven. He places the Flood so near the Creation of the World, that though they are Distant one from another above Sixteen Hundred Years, yet they almost touch one another. For, *Shem* who out-liv'd the latter, lived with those who had conversed with *Adam* himself. Had *Moses* been a false Historian, he would have put these so remarkable Things further asunder, for fear of being discovered ; the Memory of the Times they Relate to, being so very recent when he wrote ( by reason of the long Lives of the Patriarchs ) that had they not been True, it had been the easiest thing in the World, to find out the Imposture.

*Moses* was also very Modest, another great Mark of a true Historian. He writ in *Romantical Days*, the Times of the Heroes, who, for but some one Virtue or other were presently thought to be God's. Yet his great Heroes, *Abraham*, *Isaac*, and *Jacob*, are chiefly commended for their Simplicity and Piety to *Jehovah*. *Abraham's* routing four petty Kings once, with only his Domestick Servants, is but briefly touch'd upon, of which another would have made a long Story. And *Jacob's* Fraud, and his Children's Cruelty, which a designing Writer would have suppress'd, are largely related. *Moses* was bred in a great Court, and in his younger Days did valiant Things, if we may believe *Josephus*, who had it, no doubt, from some ancient Records or Tradition among the *Jews* : Yet himself says not one Word of it, only relates plainly the History of the *Israelites* coming out of *Egypt*. He sincerely owns his own Faults, and those of his nearest Relations : He records his not believing God after so many Wonders, and his Brother and Sisters murmur against him. Had he been Ambitious, he might have left his Place to his Sons ; But he left it to *Joshua*, his Servant, a  
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meer Stranger to him ; and his own Family was confounded with the Multitude.

The same Characters of Sincerity and Honesty may be observed in the rest of the Historians, who are after *Moses* in the Book, upon which, for Brevity's sake, I shall not enlarge.

The Law of the *Jews*, ingross'd in that Book, is another Thing which I have often admir'd. It is the most ancient of Laws, and has been convey'd uncorrupted to us, through infinite other Alterations. It appears to be very wise, if one take it in the Bulk, as it contains civil and religious Laws together ; every thing being so carefully provided for by it. It gives the noblest Notions of God, and contains the most perfect Body of Morals. But that which I chiefly observe, is, that the *Jews* should be so fond of it to this Day, when it is a standing Monument against them, giving in infinite Places an Account of the Rebellions of their Forefathers against God, and representing them as a very obstinate self-will'd Nation. A false Historian may, in such a Case, impose upon some few private Men, but not upon a whole People. Had *Moses* been an Impostor, the *Israelites*, in the time of whom he wrote, would soon have discover'd the Cheat, being so nearly concern'd in it ; and the *Jews* that came after them, had long ago been disabused.

These Observations might, alone, induce a reasonable Man to receive this Book. But that which over and above determines me to believe it, is, the many Prophecies extant in it, of a future extraordinary Man, call'd the *Messias* ; some of them being even before *Moses*, some in his Days, several after him ; some describing the Time, some the Place, others other Circumstances of this great Man's appearing in the World ; many, his Sufferings and ignominious Death. All these, by comparing Times and Events, must have been fulfilled towards the beginning of the *Roman* Empire. And in another Book, (which contains the Law of Christians, and the History of one *Jesus*, who about that time told the World, that  
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he was the *Messias* promis'd to the *Jews*) they being found to have met exactly in this Man : I am by it persuaded, that God revealed himself first to *Adam*, then to *Noah*, afterwards to *Abraham*, and to *Moses*, last of all to *Jesus*, as these two Books tell me.

All these revealed Religions I believe, and rest in the last, as the most perfect.

This second Book called the *New Testament* has the same Marks of Truth as the Former called the *Old*. The Writers of it own sincerely their own Faults, and those of their Fellow-Authors : That *Matthew* was a Publican or Receiver of Custom, a Name extremely Odious among the *Jews* ; that *John* run away from his Master at his Trial ; that *Peter* deny'd him ; that all his other Disciples forsook him and fled ; that one *Paul* and *Barnabas* fell out ; that another time *Paul* rebuked *Peter* ; and that they were often disputing about Places and Greatness. Had there been any Collusion between them, they would have writ more smoothly, and concealed both their own and one anothers Faults : But they are ingenuous and sincere, which strongly proves that there was none.

As for the History of *Jesus*, nothing can be more sincerely writ. His seeming dubious Birth, mean Parentage, as mean Employment, particularly some Circumstances of his Trial, which seem, at first Sight, to set him off but indifferently, are so many Proofs of the integrity of the Writers. These plain honest Men could not be mistaken in the Relation they give of *Jesus* his Life and Death ; for, they were Eye-witnesses of both. And what Interest could they have to impose upon the World, in forging or altering the Story ? When, far from getting any thing by it, they knew that they should very probably lose their Lives, as their Master had done before. The thing is too plain to leave any ground for Suspicion. For, they ( as well as he ) undertook the vast Design of reforming the World, and in all appearance offending by it the Potent and the Learned, without any Humane Means to compass it, besides Truth and Innocence :  
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Which is the greatest Presumption imaginable of their Sincerity, both in spreading the Christian Doctrine, and writing the History of *Christ*. And they having all lost their Lives for it, and yet planted the Christian Religion, without either Armies or the help of the Civil Magistrates, nay, against all their Endeavours to prevent it, for near Three Hundred Years after them; so extraordinary a Success, proves at once the Truth of their Books, that of their Doctrine, and of the Miracles which at first were made use of to support both.

The Morals Recorded in the Historical Books of the *New Testament*, and in the Epistles which are at the Foot of them, are such, that no Man can alledge any rational Exceptions to them, being the most perfect and elevated of any. As for the Doctrines and *Mysteries*, they are not many, and plain enough when the Commentary does not darken or entangle them. I am of Opinion that most of the Difficulties of the Bible are put into it, not found in it. And that, bating the darkness of the Phrase, (it being writ in old and dead Language) and some obsolete Customs of those Times, the rest would be very inconsiderable, if Expositors by their Mistakes, did not raise groundless Scruples.

For these Reasons, I thank God that I was born a Christian. I am now firmly one by my own Observations. I deplore the Blindness of the Jews, in not seeing the fulfilling long ago, of the Prophecies in their Books about the *Messias*; I admire God's infinite Wisdom in keeping them, tho' through their own Fault, asunder from Christians, and thereby making them unquestionable Witnesses to the grounds of the Christian Religion. And I am so fully satisfied of its Truth, that I quietly rest and acquiesce in it.

As for the Answer of some Deists, of the Bible's being writ, not by the reputed Authors so it, but by cunning crafty Men, and the Things which it contains being all, by them. invented; I look upon it as very unreasonable, because it destroys the certainty of all Histories, and would, if allowed, bring into the World Barbarity and

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Ignorance.

Ignorance. Let the Thing be brought to the Test. If *Moses*, for Instance, is not granted to be the Author of the Books which go under his Name, and if the Facts which he relates pass for meer Fables, notwithstanding the strong Proofs to the contrary already mentioned : Who can prove half so well, that *Tacitus* and *Livy*, *Thucydides* and *Plutarch*, writ the Books which are attributed to them ? That there ever were such Kings as *Darius* and *Alexander*, or such *Roman* Generals as *Cæsar* and *Pompey* ? If the Book of *Jonah* is rejected, in which the Author speaks so much to his own Discommendation ; what will become of Historians who writ their own Lives, and Panegyrics ? The Observation may easily be applied, to the other Books of the Bible.

And let it not be replied, that other Histories are attested by several Hands : For so are those of the Bible, as I could easily prove, if it were necessary. Nor let it be said, that other Histories may be believ'd, because Men are left at Liberty, and can lose nothing by believing or rejecting them ; but that those of the Bible are imperious Dictates, to be receiv'd upon Pain of Damnation : For, I shewed before, that a Man can lose nothing, nay, gets a great deal by receiving Religion, though it should be a Fable ; ( and this is particularly True of the Christian, which is the best of Religions ) whereas he loses much, even in this World, by rejecting it, and will be undone in another, in Case it prove True. As for Imperiousness and Threatnings, the Church of *Rome*, or some other Christian Sects we know, may answer the Charge if they please : But they are not the Stile of the Church of *England*, and provided that she is acquitted, I shall concern my self no further in it.

I foresee but one Reply more, and that is, that all Religions may, at this rate, be believed, as well as the Christian, the *Mahometan* in particular, which pretends to the like Proofs : And that accordingly every Religion is commonly followed by men that live in Places, where it is publicly professed and establish'd. To this I say, that as those of every Nation live in their own Country, and



and yet there are some Countries more Temperate and Healthful than some; so, though Men commonly follow the Religion of that Part of the World, in which they live, yet there are some Religions more Rational than others: And as it is a Happiness to be born in a fine Climate, or transplanted into it, so is it to be brought up in a good Religion, or to embrace it upon choice. As for the Pleas which the *Mahometan* Religion and other pretended revealed ones, can make for themselves; I shall freely leave the Decision of the Matter, to the Sincerity of any impartial Man, whether the Christian, in its Morals, and Reasonableness upon other Accounts, does not, by far exceed them. Nothing is wanting, but that the Lives of Christians at present, should be as much more excellent than other Mens, as their Religion is more perfect than other Religions. But this does not bear upon Christianity it self; it bears upon the professors of it, who alone are to blame, for not living up to it, as the primitive Christians did.

Having proved that there have been several true revealed Religions, and that the Christian is the last and the best of them all; I need not undertake to speak to all the Difficulties raised against the Christian Doctrines: It would be an endless Work, and one had as good go about, to number the Waves of the Sea, in the midst of a Tempest. I will content my self to clear three from those Imputations which are lay'd upon them, because I find by your Discourse, that they are the most insisted upon. And these are the Trinity of Persons in God; the Satisfaction of Christ for Mankind; and the Eternity of sensible Sufferings for the Wicked, after the Resurrection.

To the First. Next to the being of a God, it is the most fundamental Truth in Religion, that there is but one God. Nothing less than an infinite all-perfect Being can be conceived by God; and it is absolutely impossible there should be any more than one such Being. If there were many, none of them could be infinite and all-perfect, because wanting what the others should have: And to suppose their Being all-perfect and infinite, is to de-

stroy their Distinction and Multitude, and to establish their Unity. This is too plain to need any further explication. So that it is the firm persuasion of all Christians, that there is but one God.

Yet there are Three, to whom the Name of God, his Properties and Actions, are signally and distinctly attributed in Scripture. These Three are not three bare Names of God, nor meer Attributes, Relations, or Actions; for, there are in God many more than three of every one of these: And besides, if it was so, there would be no Distinction between one Divine Attribute and another, between one Divine Action and another; the Power would be the Knowledge; the Wisdom the Justice; Creation would be Redemption; Redemption Sanctification, and the like; which is contrary to Scripture, in which these are expressly distinguish'd, and severally attributed to the Three. So that we can conceive nothing less by them, than three distinct Agents or Principles of Operations in the Divine Nature: For they are chiefly described and distinguish'd one from another, by their different Actions or Operations.

I would willingly ask one of those Gentlemen, who are displeased at this Opinion, what a Christian, that owns but one God, and yet believes the Scripture to be his Word, must do in this Case, to express his Apprehension of these Three? He must, no doubt, do it by some Name or other; and that of *Person* or *Hypostasis* is as good as any one that can be used. For, by it we do not make Three Gods, as Three Humane Persons are Three Men; we only explain our Mind by a Word we find in Scripture. Let the Gentlemen whom this innocent Term offends, find us another, even of their own making, that but implies what the Bible has taught us concerning the Trinity, and we will not dispute about Words. In the mean time we may, I hope, use our Phrase, in the Sense which we give to it.

And if a Man will still be difficult, and say he cannot conceive, how Three can be but One, or how One can be Three: Let him, if he can, reconcile better the Three Faculties



Faculties of our Soul with the Unity of it, or the Three Principles of Action in the Sun, with the Unity of that Noble Star. The Writers of the *New Testament*, and the Compilers of the *Nicene Creed*, had perhaps some such Notion in their Mind; when the first call our Saviour the *Word*, or Reason and Thought of God, the *Brightness* or Effulgency of his Glory; and the others *Light of Light*. It is certain that there is but one Soul in Man, and but one Sun in the World. And yet the Apprehension, the Judgment, and the Will, are certainly Three distinct Agents in the Soul; and the Star, the Light, and the Heat, Three distinct Agents in the Sun; and not Three bare Names, Properties, or Actions; for, of these there are many more, both in the Sun and in the Soul. If Humane Reason is at a stand, even in things which are transacted within it self, and Sense at a loss in Matters of its own Province; we may own Christian Religion to have something in it, which cannot be thoroughly comprehended, and yet must be piously believed.

And as the unwary Determinations of some School-Men and Divines are not to be charged upon the Church, the Belief whereof goes no further than what I have said: So the Tenderness of some Men is no sufficient Plea, for their rejecting our plain Words and Expositions. Scripture-phrases are not to be examined with Metaphysical Distinctions. That Sacred Book was writ by Men who knew nothing of the Philosophy of the *Greeks*, and therefore is to be explain'd without it. If this was done, and grains of Allowance fairly given to some Expressions in the *Athanasian Creed*, which are intended only for Illustrations, not for rigid Definitions of the Doctrine; this ancient Symbol of the Christian Faith would soon be found to say no more of this Mystery, than the Scripture has revealed, and the Church is to believe.

As for Christ's *Satisfaction* for Mankind, we mean no more by it, than any rational Man can make of synonymous Words used in Scripture, such as are *Propitiation*, *Atonement*, *Reconciliation*, and (which come full up to it) *Price*, *Ransom*, *Buying*, and *Redemption*. It is certain that Christ as a *Sacrifice* or Victim, died for Man, and that his

Death

Death was the Price or Ransom, *for* Man's Sins. No Man can arraign these Expressions, because the Scripture uses them. And when it is declar'd, that by Satisfaction is meant no more, I cannot see where the Scruple is grounded. For, we must use Words to express our Thoughts; and if none but Scripture Phrases are to be used no more than none but Scripture Notions are to be admitted, then even the vulgar Versions of the Bible must be rejected, and Divines speak and write only in *Hebrew* and *Greek*; which is more, I suppose, than is desired, even by the Gentlemen whom the Word Satisfaction offends.

The Point of the Controversie (for ought I can perceive) lies in the Sense of these Words, that *Christ died for us*. We understand by them that he died in our room, and thereby ransom'd, redeem'd and bought us, appeas'd God, and from Angry made him propitious and favourable; his Blood and his Death being a Price paid to God for us, that we might be free from the eternal Sufferings our Sins had deserved. These Gentlemen take the Words in a very Metaphorical Sense, and by them apprehend no more than this, That Christ died for our Good; left an Example of Virtue, Patience, and constancy in Religion for us to follow; and now, by his Power (which he obtained by entering into Heaven with his Blood) does convert us from Sin to God, and thus reconcile us to him; whereupon the Punishment, due to our Sins is graciously past by, and simply forgiven, by God Almighty.

But, the Scripture is plain and full for our Exposition, and against theirs. For, it clearly intimates in many Places, that the Death of Christ is the Reality, of which the Law-Sacrifices were the Figures. Now, the Jews ever understood, that their Sacrifices were Expiatory, that is, that the Beast died, not barely for the Good, but actually in the room of the Man; as in the famous Instance of *Isaac*, and afterwards of their First-born, the Thing is without dispute; For, the Ram was certainly killed and sacrificed in the room of the Youth, and the Lambs or Kids in the room of the Boys. As for the Example of Virtue which Christ left us at his Death, if this is called

a Sacrifice, then, the Apostles and Martyrs may be said to have died for us; for, they, as well as Christ, left us by their Death an Example of Patience: Whereas St. Paul by his emphatical Interrogation, (*was Paul crucified for you?*) looks upon it, as a thing notoriously false, and plainly overthrows this over-refined Opinion. Besides, if their Explication is true, Christ could not die for them that were dead before he was born: For, Examples can do Good only to them that see or hear of them, and Men dead before Christ could not see or hear of his Death: And he could not convert Men before him, by a Power which he had not. And yet the same Apostle, speaking of the Difference between Christ and the Law-Priests, in that these offered new Blood every Year, whereas Christ died but once, and saying that if Christ must offer himself often, *he must often have suffered since the foundation of the world*, does visibly suppose that he died for them that were before him; which therefore must be by dying in their room.

This last Observation is a full Answer to one main Difficulty, which is commonly raised against Christ's Satisfaction, namely, how it could be made for Men dead before him? For, the Scripture positively affirming the retroactive Virtue of his Death, it must be believ'd: And Men, for understanding how this could be done, need go no further than daily Examples amongst themselves. For, it is a common Practice, to release Slaves upon Bond, tho' the Money is not paid; and to let Debtors out of Prison upon Bail, though the Debt is not satisfied; and in these Cases, the Price or Money, after it is counted, may be said critically to have had a retroactive Virtue, since it had effect before it was paid down. The Scripture uses this very Comparison, when Christ is said to have undertaken *in the Volume of a written Book to do the Will of God*, that is, obliged himself *from the Foundation of the World* (as firmly as any Human Bond can oblige) to die for Man in time. But, how this is consistent with their Opinion, who will not allow Christ a Being or a God-head, before he was born of Mary, let themselves consider.

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And let not the seeming Contradiction, in one Person of the Trinity his satisfying the other, be alledged against us. For, by the famous Example, of the *Locrian* Legislator, causing one of his Eyes to be put out instead of his Son's; it appears, not only that a Man's Son may satisfy his Father, but that a Man himself may satisfy his own Justice and Laws. As for the Objection against the Doctrine of Satisfaction, from that of the Forgiveness of Sins, and the first its being incompatible with the last, so often asserted in Scripture: I say, that though God took a very great Price for our Sins, even the Death of his Son, yet his Forgiveness and Graciousness to us is exceeding great; in that he found out the Means himself, and afforded the Ransom to us, and desires, in order to our having the Benefit of it, only that we forsake Sin, and be sincere for the future, in living as well as we can: which done, humble Faith in Christ will undoubtedly save us.

I know other Complaints are brought against the Doctrine of Christ's Satisfaction: That it makes of God a cruel unrelenting Father, a revengeful implacable Being, who must needs punish Sin to the full; That it ties up the Hands of his Mercy, than which nothing is oftner proclaimed in Scripture; And that it makes Christ undergo the very Pains of the Damned, which is horrible even to relate. But I shall not undertake to vindicate it from these Charges, because our Church is not concern'd in them. Let those answer them who too boldly affirm Things not revealed in Scripture. It is enough to own and believe according to it, that God out of his infinite Mercy to us, pitch'd upon the Death of his Son, as a very proper Means for our Redemption; and that the extream Sufferings of Christ, equivalent to eternal ones, by the Dignity and Nobleness of his Person, did effectually appease God, and made him turn away from us his Anger, and the Punishment due to our Sins; without defining, unnecessarily, and without any Warrant from Scripture; whether God was forc'd to this by the Inexorableness of his Justice; whether he had no other Means

Means for it; whether he was tied to any Means at all; how far, and what precisely Christ suffered: I say, without defining these, and thus prying into God's Secrets, As for God's Cruelty towards his Son, in exposing him to such Sufferings for wretched Creatures; besides that, if granted, it highly exalts his Mercy to Man (the taking away of which is one of the Objections against this Doctrine;) it cannot be urged with any Reason, since Christ offered himself very willingly, and therefore cannot be supposed to have been injured by his Father: not to reckon his Exaltation in Heaven, which made full amends for his short Sufferings upon Earth.

The last Doctrine, the Eternity of sensible Sufferings for the wicked after the Resurrection, though plainly asserted in Scripture, is denied by some Men, and changed into total Loss of Being. I will prove, from that Sacred Book, the reality of such Sufferings, and answer what they can say for their darling Annihilation.

That the Soul of Man is naturally Immortal; and also that God does not destroy it when the Body dies, but that another State is a State of Rewards or Punishments for it, I have proved already. And the Resurrection of the Body being believed by Christians, to whom I speak now, it will be granted, that the Body, when raised from the Dead, is to share in the Soul's Happiness or Misfortune. All the Question is to know, whether the Body and the Soul of the Wicked after the Resurrection, are to be eternally tormented by sensible Sufferings, or utterly annihilated and extinguish'd. Christians of all sorts ever believed the first; some few Gentlemen of late seem to believe the other. I shall not plead that the Word Annihilation is not in the Bible, as they do in the Case of Satisfaction. I will receive it, if but an equivalent be found there. But I am persuaded that no such can be produced. The very contrary is as fully express'd in several Places of it, as Words can express it. I will, of many, single out a few. Our Saviour's saying of Judas, that it had been better for him not to have been born, than *Matt. 26.* to betray him, is not consistent with Annihilation, but *24.*

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clearly supposes sensible Sufferings for *Judas* in another State. For, his Agony of Mind for a few Hours, and his bodily Pain at Death, though never so great, are not a ballancing Weight to Thirty or Forty Years of healthful and pleasurable Life : This (for all his Anguish of Mind, and Pain of Body at his Death) far from being worse, is much better than never to have been. If it be answer'd, that the Soul of *Judas* its suffering till Doom's-Day, makes Christ's saying sufficiently true, though his Body and Soul should then totally end in not Being : Besides that the Soul's suffering till Doom's-Day, and no longer, is a meer Fancy, without any Ground in Reason or Scripture : What can be said to *Dives* his Lamentable Story, who is represented, not as extinguisht, but suffering most exquisite Pains in Body and Soul ? It cannot be pretended that this was before the Resurrection ; for, his Body could not be in Hell then : Neither is it proved from his desiring to have a Messenger sent to his Brothers, then living, and capable of Repentance, which could not be after the Resurrection : This proves, at most, that some Circumstances of both States, before and after the Resurrection, are put together by Christ. If it be replied, that the whole is but a Parable ; tho' it is more than any Man can prove ; yet granting that, why may not the Eternity of sensible Sufferings after the Resurrection be taught in this, as well as other Christian Doctrines are in others ?

But I will give Two Proofs more of the Thing, to which nothing can be said that is an answer.

How can these Sayings in the *Revelation*, that at the last Day, when all Men shall stand before Christ to be judged, and the Records of their Actions shall be opened and read, *whoever is, not found in the Book of Life, is to be cast into a fiery Lake of Brimstone, where the false Prophet, the Beast, the worshippers of his Image, and a black Catalogue of flagitious Men, are together to be tormented for ever and ever, and to have no rest neither day nor night ?* How can they, I say, be reconciled with kind Annihilation, the longest and most entire Rest of any, much beyond that



that of simple *Death*, in which yet, as *Job* has long ago observed, *the weary are at rest* ? I cannot imagine, how, after these, any Christian can entertain the Thoughts of Annihilation !

Our Saviour's sending the Wicked away at the last Day, *into everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his Angels, where the worm dies not, and the fire is not quenched*, Matt. 25. 41. and their going immediately into *everlasting Punishment*, is a peremptory decision of the Matter, and quite overthrows this fond Opinion. And let it not be replied, that the Words *for ever*, and *eternal*, or *everlasting* are often used in Scripture, to signify only a long Duration and continuance. This I readily grant. But it cannot be deny'd that they are also often used in a larger Sense, to signify an endless indeterminable Duration ; as when God is said to live *for ever*, and the Righteous to go into Life *eternal*. Now it is evident that they are to be taken in this last Sense, in the Case of the Wicked after the Resurrection, because in the very same place, where Opposition is made between the Wicked and the Righteous, the Lot of both is declared to be *everlasting* : But all agree that the Just will have a Being and Pleasures *for ever* after the Resurrection ; and so must the Wicked after it, live and suffer *for ever*, by the Force of the Words.

I will say one thing more against Annihilation, and that is, that the Disciples of it have not enough considered, how many Errors and Contradictions it leads them into. It quite evacuates the Severity of God's Threatnings to the Wicked. They are very Positive, and very Terrible ; *weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, tribulation and anguish*, are to be for ever the dismal Effects of them ; and yet it makes of them but Scare-Crows, meer airy empty Metaphors, frightful Sounds, which, besides their Noise, have no reality : And though *Hell-Fire* is often affirmed in Scripture to be *eternal* and *unquenchable*, it puts it out, and totally extinguishes it in a Moment. For, that the short Grief of the Wicked, to hear themselves doomed to exclusion from Heaven-Joys, and utter Loss of being, answers them in the least, can-

not be alledg'd with any Shadow of Reason : And if we had said such a Thing, these mighty Masters of Reason would have laugh'd at us, and said, we did but jest. If they knew whose Tenent they adopt, in valuing simple Being at so great a Rate, as to make the Loss of it answer the horrible Woes, denounc'd in Scripture against Sinners, they would not be so forward to alledge it. It is the last Refuge of *Predestinarians*, who being prest from the great Cruelty with which their Opinion charges God Almighty, have recourse to the *bonitas entis*, and say that it is better to be, tho' in eternal Misery, than not to be at all ; which by the by, is directly contrary to our Saviour's Saying concerning *Judas* already mention'd ; and was any of them to have the Choice, of miserable Feeling Eternity or Annihilation, he would, no doubt, chuse this last : So that these Men, tho' *Antarcticks* one to another, run themselves upon the same Rock ; being driven thither by the Force of Reason. Their Opinion does also suppose Equality of Punishments to the Wicked. (for there are no Degrees of not Being) whereas the Scripture does plainly assert their Inequality. Even in some Cases it implies wrong and unjust disproportion of them ; as in the Case of a small Sinner in *Adam's* time, who just deserv'd Hell ; and of a very flagitious one, caught alive by the Sound of the last Trumpet : For, let the first have been never so gently us'd all this while by *Hell-Flames*, yet he has had hard Measure, a tedious long Time of it ; whereas the latter will have no other Punishment inflicted on him ; besides being extinct at a Minute's Warning, which will be the Lot of much better Men than himself, and the easiest of Deaths, even gentler than being beheaded sleeping. Thus this Opinion is beset round with inextricable Difficulties : And tho' the Defenders of it turn themselves many Ways to shift and evade them ; some believing the utter extinction of the Soul of the Wicked at the Hour of Death, and no Resurrection at all of their Body ; some allowing a long Time to *Hell-Flames* after the last Day, to make an end of both ; others embracing the Opinion attributed to *Origen*, that the Damned, and even the Devils



vils are all at last to be saved; others going other fanciful Ways: Yer are all these but meer Suppositions, without the least Warrant from Scripture, or any Ground in Reason. Thus Travellers out of their Way may wander up and down, and try infinite Paths, and yet never go right till they return into the lost, but only true Road.

It is objected from Scripture, that it is not conceivable, how the Flames of Hell should have any effect upon Devils or damned Souls, who are meer Spirits; that therefore Fire and Brimstone are Metaphorical Expressions, to represent the extream Misery of the Wicked, as those of eating and drinking, and shady Banks of Rivers, are used, to describe the Heavenly Happiness of the Just; that the Words *Death*, *Destruction* and *Perdition*, are often found in the Bible concerning the Wicked, which Words seem to supersede sensible Sufferings, and to intimate their Annihilation.

To the first, I answer, that as our Soul suffers in this Life by our Body, so may it, and the Devils too suffer by Hell-Fire, especially the Wicked after the Resurrection, in Body and Soul. As for the Metaphor urged, granting both Expressions to be Metaphorical, yet the contrary of Annihilation must needs be allotted to the Wicked, nay worse Sufferings than everlasting Burnings; as Heavenly Joys for the Just necessarily suppose their Being, and are to be infinitely more pure and refined, than eating and drinking and shady River-Banks. If Popish Divines have blown too fiercely the fiery Lake, and too boldly defin'd the Heat of it, they may answer for themselves. But, let the Metaphor be what it will, it implies, without all doubt, the Existence of the Sufferer, and most exquisite Sense of Pain, tho' the Cause of it should be never so different from our Kitchen-Fire, and Mine-Brimstone, especially in not consuming the Subjects it works upon. It were certainly a very strange unaccountable Metaphor, to represent Annihilation by being plunged into a Fiery-Lake of Brimstone for ever, and having no Rest in it, neither Day nor Night; when these Expressions bring  
naturally

naturally into the Mind, not only the being of the Sufferer, but his feeling excessive Pains, the very *Antipodes* of total Extinction.

As for the Word *Death*, it is commonly used in Scripture, to signifie very great Misery, as when People are said to be *vex'd to Death*, that is, extremely vexed; when St. Paul saith that he was *often in Deaths*, and that *he died daily*, to represent the many Dangers he run, and the extraordinary Hardships he underwent for the Gospel: And if some Things are said to be *more bitter than Death*, that is, exceeding bitter, why may not the extreme Misery of the Wicked, far beyond Loss of Being or Annihilation, be exprest by the Words *Death*, *second Death*, and *eternal Death*?

As for the Words *Perdition* and *Destruction*, they are also frequently used in the Bible, to signifie, not the Annihilation, but the extreme Loss or Affliction of the sufferer. The Beast in the *Revelation* is said to go *into Perdition*, which yet is not to be totally Extinct, but to suffer great Torments for ever, as I said before. The Prodigal Son saith he did *perish for hunger*, though he was alive. God is frequently said to *destroy Nations*, when he brings great Calamities on them, tho' they still are in Being. And the Jews are said to have *sought to destroy Jesus*, whom, I suppose, no body will affirm, to have by them been annihilated.

Luke 15.  
17

Mar. 11.  
18.

It is objected from Reason, that the eternal sensible Sufferings of the Wicked, seem to be contrary to the Justice and Goodness of God, who had been infinitely more gracious to Men, not to have made them at all, than to let them be brought to so much Misery, though never so justly deserved: That many Nations are plunged in Ignorance of him and his Laws; and what Proportion is there in the Case of those poor People, between short, light, unavoidable Offences, and eternal Woes for them? Especially, considering that no Good will accrew by it to God or his Laws, and no Benefit to other Men, who will then be past taking Warning by these cruel Torments: Whereas the chief End of Punishments, even amongst

amongst them, is Obedience to the Laws, and Example to others.

I answer the following Things, which I desire may be considered with Attention, towards clearing the Doubt, and vindicating the Goodness and Justice of God.

Having to do with Christians, I think my self bound, out of Respect to Scripture, to give a general silencing Answer to the whole, in St. Paul's Words: *O man, who art thou that repliest against God? shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?* Rom. 9. 20.

The first Head bears as much against any Sin, Irregularity or Suffering; for, according to the full Import of it, it were better if no such Thing at all had been; and yet no Man ever arraign'd these, or God's Justice and Goodness, for that Reason.

Man cannot fathom the infinite Wisdom and Design of God. I will suppose it was his Pleasure to create Man a free and rational Agent: What would the Objector have him to have done in such a Case, that he has not done? He has done all to make Man Good and Happy, but forcing him to be Good and Happy whether he would or no; which had been to destroy Man's Nature, and his own Wisdom. He gave Man Reason, the Knowledge of his Duty, Power to discharge it, Encouragement towards it by Promises, Guards and Bars from Sin by Threats. He bears with him to the very last, offers to him all along his Pardon and Grace, upon but Sorrow for the past, and Sincerity for the future, which, by his universal divine Assistance, it is in any Man's Power to afford. He is told these Things all the Days of his rational Life. Life and Death are continually set before him: And if after all this he chuses Death, who but himself is to blame for it? may he not justly be said in the Scripture Phrase, to have *destroyed himself*?

As for heathenish Nations, God will consider their Ignorance when not to be helpt, and judge them only by the Law of Nature, and with a great deal of merciful Allowance too, according to St. Paul's Decision: So that none shall be finally Miserable, but they who have wilfully

fully some way or other deserved to be so: And Degrees of Punishment in the Pains, though not in the duration, will be proportionated to the Degrees of Sinners.

Suffering eternally for short small Offences, is Daily seen, even amongst Men. For, but stealing a small Summ of Money a Felon loses his Life, the Loss of which is eternal: yet no Man will say this Punishment is unjust. Particularly in the Case of the Wicked, such a Punishment cannot be supposed to be too much; considering the Greatness of God, the infinite Respect due to his Laws, by all means to be preserved, and hardly preserved for all this; especially Man's free Choice, and his Power by God's Grace, to avoid Sin and Hell. And the greater his Punishment is, the kinder is God to give such full reiterated Warnings of it; and the more blameable is Man, rashly and wilfully to venture upon Actions, which may bring it down upon his Head. I heard once a Prisoner complain of his being in Gaol, for not paying a small Debt, when every body knew he had Money to pay it: And I thought that the smaller the Summ was, and the easier to be paid, the better deserved was the Imprisonment, and the more justly inflicted upon him.

To the last Branch of the Objection, I say that the Goodness of God is not to be conceived insensible to the greatest Affronts: This were imperfection in him; but 'tis in such a sort, as (for the Honour of his Majesty) to have also Severity with it: which to satisfy the Law will finally be put in Execution, to the Glory of God in the Presence of his Angels, and to the eternal Confusion of Devils and wicked Men, his declared Enemies. And this, tho' nothing but Woe and Sorrow to the Wicked, yet will be very great Benefit to the Good, to see themselves in comparison so Happy; for ever delivered from the Fear of Sin and its deserved Punishment; and signally avenged of their Accusers and Persecutors, for which they are, in the *Revelation*, solemnly invited to rejoice.

As for the Comparison between God's and Man's Justice, it is, I know, the strong Hold of the favourers of Annihilation, the ofteneft by them insisted upon, in which

which they seem to triumph, as being thought impossible to be answer'd. But it will in a Moment be batter'd down, and fall to the Ground, by shewing that it is absolutely false, and directly contrary to Scripture, and to Reason. Man's Justice has a grim Look upon Malefactors, in their Life-time, seising, keeping, and trying them, with Severity and Rigor ; because the end of it is to make others afraid, and to prevent their breaking the Laws. But when a Criminal is condemn'd, and shortly to be executed, the Judge puts then on a mild compassionate Disposition towards him, as a poor Creature whose Death is unavoidable, and who, by sincere Repentance, may make his Peace with God, before he dies. And this same Method God has been seen to observe in his temporal Justice ; for Instance, under the Law, because he was a kind of a Civil Magistrate to the Jews, and had in prospect their amendment, and that others should *bear and fear*, obey his Laws better, *and do no more presumptuously*. But the eternal Justice of God, as he is the supreme Judge of the World, is, in this Regard, quite contrary to Humane Justice. It is very mild to Sinners in this Life, still calling upon them to repent, being concern'd that they do not, compassionately grieving at their Obstinacy, and giving them reprieve and delay to their dying Hour : Whereas at the last Day, when his Patience shall have been exhausted, and *the Riches of his Goodness, Forbearance, and Long-Suffering despised* to the end ; neither Warning to others, nor Obedience to his Laws, but asserting his Majesty and Greatness, and satisfying his *Wrath and Indignation*, will be the sole End of the Punishment. He will then *laugh at the Calamity* of the Wicked, and *judge and punish them without Mercy*, that is, without any other prospect in it, besides his Glory, and Truth, and Justice. They shall be *tormented for ever in the Presence of the Lamb* ; our Saviour himself, who once lov'd them so as to die for them, looking then upon their eternal Misery, without the least relenting Compassion.

The Reason of this Difference, is grounded on the Different Nature of Things. God's infinite Goodness makes him bear Patiently with Men, all their Life-time, that they may mend ; and his as infinite Wisdom and Justice, ob-

liges him to punish them severely at last, because they would not mend. To forgive and bless an unrepenting Sinner, would be as improper, as to punish a penitent one. Therefore the Devils and the Damned will owe their eternal Misery to their stubborn Resistance to the last; and, of the Two, will perhaps be better pleased with Hell, than with Heaven; as some Creatures delight in Dirt and Mire, more than in being Clean. God knows all this, and suits his Justice and Goodness accordingly. But Man's Ignorance is the Cause of his different proceeding. He cannot tell but that a Wretch may repent, and save his Soul, by the ignominious Loss of his Body, and therefore pities and assists him in that regard. Did Men know the Hearts of Malefactors, who is Penitent and who not, they would save the Convert, and execute without Mercy the obdurate Offender.

To plead, after this, for Annihilation, as answering sufficiently what I have last said of God's Wisdom and Justice, is to plead against Reason, and the unanswerable Difficulties which Annihilation does imply; pointed out by God's Providence in this World towards good and wicked Men, which is irreconcilable with the utter Destruction of the last, in another State, as I have hinted already.

And to hope for Mitigation in the Punishment, because God is not bound to execute his Threatnings, as he is to make good his Promises, is to hope against the plain declaration, of Scripture. For, tho' God, it may be, is not ty'd by his Justice to be as Severe as his Word, as he is by his Goodness to be as Good as his Word; yet he is bound by his Veracity to speak Truth, and he *cannot lye, nor deny himself.* And *Christ* and his Apostles having very clearly and very often taught the eternity of sensible Sufferings for the Wicked after the Resurrection, the Thing cannot be helped, nor hoped against with Reason, but must be believed as unavoidable and most certain.

I shall end this last Head with a Sincere Declaration of my firm Belief of eternal sensible Torments, to be inflicted on the Wicked after their Resurrection. As for Annihilation, besides the utter falseness of it, and its being contrary both to Reason and Scripture; I look upon



it as a dangerous Opinion, and very apt, if hearkned to, to turn in a short Time all Religion and Fear of God out of the World. For, it being certain by daily Experience, that wicked Men are often happiest in this Life, if there is no other for them, why need they fear in Private? And what Check can they have upon their Mind, even in the midst of their most villanous Practises, if they are but secret? This is so palpable, that *Socinus* himself, who first broach'd that pernicious Doctrine, in his Tract of the morality of *Adam*, being told in a Letter by *Volkelius*, a Disciple of his, how destructive it might prove to the Morals of Men, could not but own it; and declared in his Answer to him, that he foresaw it, when he first vented it, but that he had taken Care to insinuate it, before the Reader was aware of it: And much to the same purpose do some of his Followers now both write and speak. This seems to me no better than downright Prevarication; for Truth needs not be ashamed to be seen naked, nor fear any consequences, which can but be Fair and Honourable. And if the Heart of this daring Leader misgave him upon the Brink of Danger, and going to leap over a broad Precipice; let the bold Champions of his assertions have a care, lest this devilish Engine should one Day, to their extreme Ruine, recoil upon them, and break in their Hands, and failing them half way, let them fall plumb down into the very midst of an unpassable Gulph.

Thus, Sir, I have endeavour'd, to give a fair Answer to these unreasonable Opinions, and to prove the Truth plainly. Give me Leave to end as I have begun, by wishing you all that is Good; and begging of you, for your own sake, seriously to weigh the short, but important Contents of my Letter.

Consider that Christian Religion has no great Difficulties in the Doctrine, especially to a Man of Sense, as you are. That setting aside the melancholy Fancy of some Divines, whom neither you, nor I do believe, it lays no hard Restraints upon Man; but allows him Pleasure enough, if he will live as Man, and shew himself reasonable in his Enjoyments, as well as in his Speculations.

That

That without Religion, and the rational Scints of it, Man with all his Reason and outward fair shew, is only a worse sort of wild Beast, a promiscuous, malignant, treacherous Creature. That the end of Irreligion is the undoing him actually in this World, and possibly in another; and the end of Religion the making him Happy in both States. That the Vices now most in Fashion, and which, some one or more of them, are, I am afraid, at the root of these desperate Opinions, are directly against Reason, and even against Man's temporal Interest. And that if it is a deplorable Blindness to live *without God in the World*, it is much more deplorable, believing God, to live in Vice.

Let me conjure you, to open your Heart to these Considerations; To use all proper Means of avoiding ill mixt Companies, and varnisht Conversations, that might betray your Innocence, or corrupt your Belief; and to remember, as the last and warmest Advice of your most hearty Friend, that moderate Knowledge, and Morality, are the surest Ways towards Soundness in Religion.

I am,

Dear Sir,

Feb. 6th 1694.

*Your most Affectionate*

*Humble Servant, &c.*

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FINIS.

